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## Marcus, Beth Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

John Maassen

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Oral History Interview with  
Beth Marcus

Conducted September 9, 1997  
by John Maassen

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project  
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project  
Interview with Beth Marcus  
September 9, 1997  
Interviewer: John Maassen

JM: We are with Beth Marcus and we're preparing with her her oral history for submission to the Joint Archives of Holland for those who will go on in the future. This is John Maassen who is interviewing. By the way, I want to make a point that Beth and I have had a long relationship. We were born on the same day in this community. Although we went to different elementary and junior high schools we became classmates at Holland High School and also at Hope College and then our careers with the Reformed Church in America tended to parallel. I say this only because it may color the things that we will be dealing with this morning. Well Beth, in this very lovely setting we want to hear more about your career which has been quite a distinguished one and a very pioneering career in some detail, and I thought you might give us some of the statistics that we need to have here on the tape this morning. You were born when?

BM: May 3, 1920.

JM: And you were born where?

B: In Holland, Michigan, at home.

JM: So was I, in Zeeland. Tell me about your family, your father and your mother and your siblings.

B: My father and mother were both born here in Holland. They met at Ninth Street Christian Reformed Church and were married there. Then just to show their pattern

they moved from there to become charter members of Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church. They were there for a number of years. My mother sang in the choir. She and her sister did a lot of singing of duets and so on and so forth. Then they went over to become charter members of Maple Avenue Christian Reformed Church, and that's where I was baptized. When I was four years old we left there and went to Third Reformed Church and that still is my church.

JM: Was there any particular reason why you might have made that change? Of course, you wouldn't remember that yourself but...

B: I certainly don't remember it, but I asked my mother. She was in a sense somewhat embarrassed to say. There was no theological reason for it at all. My grandmother had died and my grandfather remarried a little too soon for my mother's liking so she just wanted to not be near him for a while. So it was a family situation and years later things sort of straightened out. But I always smile a little bit about that - you'd think there would be some other kind of reason...

JM: Considering how involved you have been in the RCA its a very unusual reason for becoming so involved (laughter). What was your father's occupation?

B: My father worked in the Holland Shoe Company. He started when he was 14 years old, and I don't think in all of his life and he died at the age 55, very young, I don't ever remember him having a vacation. He worked six days a week. He worked, as he always called it, "on the bench" for a number of years but then he became foreman and served in that capacity for the rest of the time that he worked at Holland Shoe Company. It was an advantage to us for having worked there because he took

to sort of designing shoes a bit and got involved in that and often would bring home pairs of shoes for us to try out to see whether we liked them. But basically that's what he did all of his life. He made many friends there. There are still people that I meet on the street who talk about knowing my dad when he was at Holland Shoe Company.

JM: Was he active in the church in any leadership role?

B: Yes, he was a deacon. Off and on he was treasurer for the church for a while. He only went through the eighth grade, but I always said he went to high school and college with me because if I had to write a paper on anything he'd say well, he'd like to read things about that too and would bring some helpful suggestions and so sort of shared in that educational experience.

JM: You, of course, as a family continued to have your relationship with Third Reformed Church.

B: We moved from Maple Avenue to Third Reformed Church and then really became very involved. My mother became superintendent of the junior department, I believe it was, for years, in the Sunday School. My sister and I sang in the choir. We were very active in those years. My father and mother were sponsors of the Christian Endeavor and we had a group of over a hundred members in Junior and Intermediate Christian Endeavor. So very heavily involved. Went to catechism and Sunday School, church. It was our life outside of going to school.

JM: Interestingly enough, I took an oral history of Dick Oudersluys and Dick said that when he came to Third Church as a young theological professor, he was attracted to

Third Church because there was a good percentage of blue collar workers in that church at that time. He tended to agree that wasn't the case any more. Would you make that comment or...?

BM: Yes, I think that's really quite true. And I'm glad you mentioned that because I really hadn't thought about that. But as I reflect on it now, yes. And my father really was a blue collar worker except that when he became a foreman that gave him a little bit more whatever you want to call it. I was thinking about our minister, Bill Van't Hof at Third Church, and my father and he got along so well. I can remember night after night he would come by and sit and talk. Bill would say that he so appreciated hearing from my father about what it meant to work in a factory because he said he didn't realize that himself having gone right from one school to the other. But that's quite a different situation today. In fact, now if you look at our congregation there are very few that I think you would call blue collar workers.

JM: You have siblings?

BM: I had an older brother who was three years older than I was, who died - it's going to be ten years ago now.

JM: His name was?

BM: Carl. He lived in Holland a good share of his life. He was in the Army for a while and then he was away for a little bit, came back and became very involved and finally was the head of Michigan Bell Telephone Company here in Holland. He went to Hope College until he was drafted and went into the service and then he didn't finish. He only had, I think, half a year to finish but he never did quite finish then.

JM: How did he spend his career then?

BM: He worked for a while for the Holland Furnace Company and then he became a salesman for Michigan Bell and finally he came to be manager here in Holland.

JM: And you have a sister?

BM: A younger sister who didn't go to college...

JM: Her name is?

BM: Doris, and was really a good student at Holland High School. As I look back I don't know why she didn't go. I got so involved in college and so forth that I...But she liked office work and took typing and shorthand and those things while she was in high school, and in fact started with a part-time job while she was a senior in high school. That maybe changed her whole perspective in terms of she didn't want to give up that job after she had gotten started. Whereas Carl lived pretty much of his time here in Holland, she married a little bit later and then moved to Rockford, Illinois, where she still lives after some forty-some years. Married a Frank Delia, an Italian. She has two children both of whom live in Rockford. Carl has three children and I am very happy because two of them live in Holland and one in Saugatuck and they include me in all their family gatherings. So it's like being a part of it.

JM: Where did you go to elementary school?

BM: Washington School down on the corner of Eleventh and Maple.

JM: Was that close to your home?

BM: It was only three short blocks from my home.

JM: And your first home address was?

BM: 155 West Fourteenth, Fourteenth and Maple.

JM: And how long did you live there?

BM: Wow, let's see. 1920 until I moved out of there in 19...Well, I left for a while and of course went to New York...

JM: Oh, I see. So that's been your home from the time you were a child.

BM: Yes, and we kept that home even after I retired in '86 and came back to Holland.

JM: In other words, you didn't move a great deal here in Holland.

BM: In Holland I was born in that house and lived there until I moved out of it 50 years later.

JM: Is that right! That's interesting. Tell me about your elementary school experience. You had kindergarten? Was kindergarten in effect then?

BM: Kindergarten I don't remember that much. I remember first grade. I remember my first grade teacher. She was a member of Third Reformed Church so I knew her very well. My favorite teacher was my fourth grade teacher.

JM: If you have names it would be nice to give them.

BM: Yes. The first grade teacher...her first name was Anita...Do you think I can think of her last name? It'll come. But she married Ted Du Mez from the Du Mez store downtown. In fact, her son Ted and her grandson Tim, is now a member of Third Church too, a great worker there. That was first grade. Second grade I don't recall. Third...Fourth grade was a woman by the name of Kathryn Wilbur and I always think of that because she graduated from college and we were her first class. Then when I later graduated from college and taught I remembered Kathryn Wilbur and the



struggles she had and thought well I guess I can have a few too. I kept in touch...in fact, I still correspond with her. She lives in Saginaw, Michigan. She was married and had some children. Her husband since has died but I keep in touch with her. And then my fifth grade teacher was Gertrude (at that time her name was Flaitz). Then she married Howard Douwstra. And she was also the music teacher and then she married Howard Douwstra and is still living in a retirement home here in Holland. My sixth grade teacher was Marian Shackson and she, too, is still living in her 90s. Very active in HASP at Hope College and very active in the Methodist Church. What I remember about grade school are two or three things. One, I was in the band. We had a kindergarten band and a first grade band. I have all kinds of pictures. I think I played the triangle, isn't that what that what they called it? Real...difficult! (Laughs) Then I remember in the sixth grade we had a contest and I think it was Gertrude Douwstra, (I think she was still Fleitz at that time). We had a contest and she would play records and then we had to recognize them.

JM: Oh, yes. Music appreciation.

BM: Music appreciation. And then they'd have a contest and I'm telling you, boy, I worked at that. I think I was lucky enough to win it off and on, but two or three times a year we would have a contest. We'd have to give the name of the piece and the person who wrote the piece and all of that.

JM: How did you approach school? Of course, you were very young. With anticipation? Or with some dread or...maybe you don't remember.

BM: Don't remember but I would guess that I had no problem. I loved it from day one.

can't remember a day that I ever wanted to stay home or didn't want to be a part of what was going on.

JM: You may or may not be acquainted with the elementary school program today, but if you are, what differences might you be able to highlight?

BM: I really don't know an awful lot about elementary school today. I have a niece who's teaching and when I hear her talk about lesson plans that she's building for, I don't know what class, I think she's in second grade if I'm not mistaken, and I think, "Oh my gracious! Those kids are learning that in the second grade!" It's hard for me to comprehend what those youngsters...the challenges before them these days.

JM: What was the place of religion in your elementary school experience at the school? Were there prayers? Were there anything of that sort? I can remember that in my experience. I was just wondering what your experience was.

BM: I don't remember it in the classroom so much. I remember that we would have school assemblies and there would often be a prayer offered there and I can't connect with what was the purpose of the assembly and that...But there I would hear that. But I don't remember like having devotions in our classroom. I would guess we probably did, but it didn't take with me.

JM: In those days it was all of life, wasn't it.

BM: Yes.

JM: I assume it was pretty much of a monoethnic group?

BM: Yes. This doesn't quite answer that question, but I did have a few Catholic friends. Our house, our lot, was at the edge of the Catholic School playground, and we used

to play on the swings and the teeter totters and whatever else were there and got to know a lot of those kids in that area. And also some of my friends went to the Catholic School. Their parents sent them to the Catholic School thinking they would get a better education, or more disciplined at least.

JM: Some Protestants here in Holland sent their children to the Catholic School?

BM: Oh yes. Not a whole lot but there were two or three. Then later, because the Catholic School only went through the eighth grade, they would come of course to the Holland High School and we'd see them there. Although again, some of those that were sent to the Catholic School to start with then went away to school, to private schools later even and didn't come to Holland High School.

JM: I suppose in those days there was definitely a division between those who went to the Christian School and those who went to the public school. There wasn't a lot of interaction. Is that correct?

BM: I think that's true. Actually a number of my relatives went to the Christian School since they were all members of either of Maple Avenue or Fourteenth Street or one of the Christian Reformed Churches.

JM: In general your paths didn't intersect.

BM: That's right.

JM: That pertains to the first eight years of your education or did you have a junior high experience?

BM: I had a junior high experience. Yes. In fact, they had a new junior high built just before we moved into it I think. That is now the headquarters, the main office on

River Avenue and Sixteenth Street.

JM: And when did junior high begin for you? What grade?

BM: It was seventh, eighth and ninth grade, I think, we went to junior high. Tenth, eleventh and twelfth in high school.

JM: That was not a big difference for you geographically, was it? You only had to walk a little bit further.

BM: Right. The elementary school was three blocks one way and junior high and high school were just three blocks the other way. Very great for us! Some of the kids would ride their bikes, but for the most part we all walked.

JM: What was that program like? How did it differ from your elementary school program?

BM: We had a home room. And then we'd go to different rooms for the various classes. There you began to indicate what your interests were, I think. We had interesting things like we had semester of sewing and a semester of cooking, and then you could choose if you wanted to take additional hours in that. But already I was looking forward to being a teacher, going to college, so I would stay more with what I would call more academic subjects. I took more history and English because that was going to be my field.

JM: Does the name Mame Ewald mean anything to you?

BM: Sure does! Yes!

JM: I was practice teacher for her.

BM: Were you really!

JM: I taught ninth grade for a semester.

BM: Sure. Yes, I had her in the ninth grade.

JM: A wonderful person!

BM: Right! Really all of the teachers that I had - I just can't think of any one of them that I didn't fully appreciate. They were all great. Some of them we would kid about once in a while. Everybody had they're own way you know. But for the most part I am most grateful because they loved their jobs and they loved kids, students and...

JM: Was there a daily chapel experience also, or assembly experience?

BM: In junior high school I think we had that in our home room because I can't remember...Well, if we ever had an assembly we had it in the gym. We'd just have to sit on the floor in the gym. We had no auditorium. And when we got to high school, we had morning worship, brief but always every morning, before we went to class. We all met in the auditorium and there was a Scripture...

JM: That was pretty much of a theater setting as I remember. Individual seats and a nice sloped floor. I checked on the high school paper some time ago for research and it was interesting that particularly at the high school level the Christian emphasis was very clear. There was a course in Bible.

BM: Yes!

JM: There was daily Scripture reading and hymns. Jock Riemersma was the principal and led all of that. That was just taken for granted, wasn't it?

BM: Right.

JM: What about your high school experiences? I suppose it was at that point when your

social activity began to intensify too in your life?

BM: I was very involved in Campfire Girls and became a leader of one of the groups. So that took care of a lot of after school activity. And then I guess actually the thing that changed or took hold of my life was when I was in the tenth grade and I was in the choir and the choir was singing. I don't know why, whether it was in a contest or what but we were up in Muskegon for the day. And when I got back I was told that I had been chosen as representative to go to Washington for the American Red Cross Convention. I can't tell you how that all was initiated or just what, but anyway I was given that information. So I had to talk that over with my parents, of course, but they were very happy to have me do that. I went on the train to San Francisco to the American Red Cross Convention, and as an aside, it's interesting because one of the persons also heading in that direction was Harvey Staal.

JM: Oh, is that right!

BM: We didn't know each other. But we met on that train and we've known each other ever since.

JM: For the tape you might just describe who Harvey is.

BM: Harvey became a Reformed Church missionary, worked in the middle east and I went over to visit them later, many years later, of course, when I was working with the denomination. That was a very significant because what happened was, right out of that, I was asked to become what they called chairperson for the Junior Red Cross.

JM: Chairperson for the Junior Red Cross in what setting?

BM: In every school...well, for Ottawa County. We had an organization in every school.

I wish I could remember it all in detail but I know that each child gave a penny or two pennies or whatever else and that made them a member of the Junior Red Cross. Then we would ask them to do certain service projects like to make nut cups for the veterans in Battle Creek in the Veterans Hospital and so forth. Now, let's see, that would be '36-'37. Then I got organized and I had such a wonderful experience in San Francisco that I decided everybody else should have that experience. We earned money then to send student to the national convention which was then held in Washington, D.C. So I look back and say how did I dare to do it? Here I was myself only what, fifteen or sixteen years old, and I got one other person to drive a car and we drove two carloads of kids. Stayed over night in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and on into Washington.

JM: How old were these children?

BM: Well, they were junior high and high school.

JM: Your peers then.

JM: Yes. I didn't dare really to take too much younger ones but they were about the same age. Actually I got adults to do the driving. I didn't want to be responsible for that. We then had an organization which when the war broke out we had contacts in all of these schools and we got women in those groups to do all kinds of things that had to be done at that point in terms of knitting, and sewing and so forth. I stayed with that all the way through college. We had Saturday morning meetings at the Red Cross office, and I am proud to say that there are a couple of people like Ken Weller, who later became president of Central College of the Reformed Church, John Pruis, who

became president of Ball State. All of these were part of that group that we organized in those days.

JIM: It occurred to me that you had quite a strong interest in English and literature, right? Because I think that's where our paths crossed often. You want to expand on that on the high school level? Who your teachers were that impressed you and any other teachers and courses that were important?

BM: Well, Lillian Van Dyke who was our English teacher. A beautiful woman, still living, still as sharp as can be, independent as can be...Who else...

JM: Janet Mulder?

BM: Oh yes, of course. Janet Mulder. I thought the world and all of her too. And remained friends with her all the way through college since she lived with Metta Ross, who I then had as a teacher at Hope College. Lucille Donovan...well, she was in the library, wasn't she, while we were there. Oh, she taught speech! She was a good speech teacher and always directed the senior play. Another person I always remember at high school was Earl Hansen, Prof. Hansen. He must have taught social studies or something, didn't he? I'm trying to think.

JM: It wasn't chemistry, was it? No, no, that was college.

BM: That was Chapman. I had Chapman for chemistry, but I think Irvin taught either history or social studies. Anyway, he was one that just was...if you wanted to talk about anything or if you wanted information about anything you went to Prof. Hansen.

JM: You talked about being in the kindergarten band. Did that band interest accompany



you through the years?

BM: No, I sang in the choir. I was in the glee club.

JM: And what about phys ed? You probably took part in phys ed in high school. What kind of an experience was that for you?

BM: Well, we didn't have a whole lot. In those days I don't remember any women's teams of any kind. It was just the routine kind of thing. We had Athletic Sisters who sold candy bars and popcorn at the ballgames. Never missed a ball game, that's for sure. We might have had some intermural stuff, but we didn't have any kind of high school soccer team or tennis team or basketball team or anything in those days.

JM: And then, of course, you went directly to Hope College.

BM: That's right.

JM: And did you spend the summer with the Red Cross?

BM: I did. And in fact all the years that I was at Hope College afternoons, after school and Saturdays, I often worked at the Red Cross.

JM: Was that an employment? Not just volunteer?

BM: No, that was all volunteer. It was all volunteer. Then, as you well know, graduated in 1942...

JM: Let's go back to the college a bit, shall we? You lived at home, I suppose.

BM: Sure. Couldn't afford to do anything else.

JM: It didn't seem sensible either in those days, did it, to live in the dorm? It seemed hardly sensible if you had a home in town.

BM: We failed, I think, to realize some of the advantages of that.

JM: Yes, I was a commuting student too.

BM: I was lucky enough to get a small scholarship. But my father was supporting me 100% in going but, well of course, in those days, what did we pay, \$55 a semester?

JM: It was very small.

BM: And even that was a struggle. There were times when we had to really worry...

JM: My memory of registration was going up the stairs in the chapel and sitting down with President Wynand Wichers and with Millie Schuppert. I think that was pretty much the administrative staff.

BM: That's right. I remember at one time I had to go in because we weren't going to be able to make it, make the payment by whatever the date was, and he was very understanding and said, "All right, we know you're going to come through with it."

JM: But the red tape was virtually nil.

BM: Oh yeah. Sure. It was person to person. You just went in and sat down and talked to him and it was wonderful.

JM: Do you remember the enrollment at that time?

BM: In all the years that we were there I don't think it was ever over 500 was it? The whole school?

JM: That's my guess, too, although I really don't know.

BM: I always think nowadays there's more as a freshman class than we ever had in the whole college.

JM: Now you had to determine a major eventually. How soon did you come to that decision?

BM: I think from day one. When I went to school, I went with the purpose of becoming a teacher and English.

JM: So English and education were your emphases.

BM: Yeah. I took French and German. I'd had four years of Latin in high school but language is still...I thought maybe I could go into some of that and that it would help me get a job somewhere.

JM: Were you anticipating a secondary school career in education or elementary?

BM: Secondary.

JM: And what about sororities, things of that sort?

BM: In college? Yes, I became a member of Delphi Sorority, really quite active in that in programming and so forth. We were always quite serious about it all, I think. It was a certain amount of social life, but first of all, when you've got to struggle to pay for what you're doing, then you're pretty serious about what you're doing when you're on campus. So a little bit of social life, but mostly hitting the books. Then I did get part time jobs. I worked in the drug store two or three summers. I worked out at the lake, living in with a family, taking care of kids and doing that kind of thing, to try to earn some money.

JM: Working at the lake may have been one of your rare experiences at the lake because it sounds to me that your parents did not do much vacationing. So any talk about the lovely experiences at resorts and so on was not in your...

BM: No. My dad did like to swim and so we would go out, probably on a Saturday afternoon after we had done all the work around the house and everything else that

had to be done, and then we'd go out to Lake Michigan. He's the one who taught me how to swim. And my mother didn't like the beach at all. It just wasn't her thing. She'd go along and she'd sit in the car.

JM: So it was really a work environment, strong puritan work ethic. Achievement was all part of it.

BM: Absolutely!

JM: Did you do any practice teaching?

BM: Yes, I did, with Janet Mulder at Holland High School.

JM: You did? That's interesting! That must have been a great experience!

BM: Right!

JM: Janet Mulder and Metta Ross, of course, were so close and extensions of one another.

BM: Yes, I appreciated her. She was helpful. I still think back to some of the things she told me about myself that I hadn't realized. She was very frank but very helpful.

JM: Now, having education in mind, that led you to your first job?

BM: Yes. When we were seniors, the second semester of the last year, superintendents would come to the campus and the education department would inform us of those visits and we would be interviewed by various people. And I was lucky. Clarence Heemstra, himself a graduate of Hope College, who was superintendent of schools in Fenton, Michigan, at that time, came to the campus and he was looking for a number of teachers. I don't remember how many. But I know that he hired Gus Van Eerden and Lilith Brouwer and myself out of that class. And since we all lived in Holland we could commute back and forth. Lilith had a car, so, at 4:05 on Friday afternoon

we would be in the car coming back home.

JM: Were teacher jobs plentiful then?

BM: Yeah. I don't recall anybody having a struggle getting a job.

JM: I'd like to go back to the college days for a moment yet because we were there at a very critical time. The depression was just winding down and the war clouds began to gather. How did that impact your college experience?

BM: Well, of course a lot of the fellows...I imagine that they...what's the word I want?...went into the service on their own.

JM: They enlisted.

BM: And then, well you know better than I, when did they start getting drafted? I don't even know.

JM: Oh I would say about 1940, '41.

BM: I guess so. I can't remember just how that was, but I think by the time we were seniors there were an awful lot of the fellows gone. There weren't an awful lot of fellows around.

JM: It seems to me that there were various currents that went through the campus about the war initially. There were some who seemed to be pacifistic. There was the influence of Sen. Vanden Berg on the campus. He was an isolationist. It seems to me we once had somebody come to us representing the Russian government who spoke to us in chapel. Do you remember anything about that?

BM: That I don't. I imagine that you would be closer to that than I was since it would affect you more than I. I began to feel it with the Red Cross. There were certain

kinds of preparations that began to take place that I got involved in. Of course, as I said, we found so many of the fellows who were volunteering or entering the service. I don't know how many were left.

JM: They were drafted too. I had the option to finish my year because I was a senior when Pearl Harbor took place. Where were you when Pearl Harbor took place?

BM: Home.

JM: You were not singing in the college choir?

BM: No. Not that day.

JM: The reason I mention that is because that was the first Christmas Vespers and I was taking my robe off as a member of the choir down in the lower level of the chapel when I heard about Pearl Harbor.

BM: Is that right? No, I can see myself sitting in our living room. My father and my mother and my sister and I don't know where my brother was at that given moment.

JM: December, '41. The middle of our senior year. The exodus of the men really accelerated even after we graduated and that's another story. But you started teaching in Fenton and this was a high school experience?

BM: Junior high and high school. I taught English and history. Seventh, eighth and ninth grade and high school. As I look back at it, I just think I didn't do a good job. I didn't really know what I was doing. I worked hard, but it takes a long time to understand what your goals really are. We made lesson plans and did everything that we had been instructed to do. But there were various things. I think, one, because the war was going on and my brother had entered the service and I was concerned

about him, and then...this is coming home every weekend and so forth. We never became a part of that community. As I look back on it, that was not the best thing to do. A few weekends we stayed and I remember I sang in the choir at the Presbyterian Church there, whatever, but really never became a part of that community. But in terms of the war then. Let's see, in '42 I taught, '42 and '43. And when I came home from that first year for the summer I had a contract to return for the fall. When I got home and went to the Red Cross to see what was going on and learned that the executive with whom I had worked for a number of years as a volunteer (she was the only paid staff I think at that point) was leaving. Out of the blue the board came to me and said, "Would you take that job?" Well, I was twenty-three years old and I thought I didn't know if I dared take on that thing and they said, "We'll work with you but you are more acquainted with every aspect of it than anybody else and et cetera." So, with that, I became the executive for the County Red Cross.

JM: Just at a very critical time, right?

BM: When everything was just beginning to open up. The Red Cross was really trying to get everything organized and running.

JM: Where was your office?

BM: Six East Eighth Street, right across the street from the Warm Friend Tavern. One of the insurance men gave us use of four rooms upstairs. We had to walk up those steps up and down. I don't know how many hundreds of times that I ran up and down those steps. But we were right downtown and we worked with the agencies - the

American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and all of those agencies as well as the social agencies in town. There was at that time a council of social agencies and the Red Cross was a part of that. So we knew what their programs were and they knew ours so we could refer each other for various things.

JM: What were your immediate goals coming into a situation like that?

BM: Well, my personal goals were certainly to come to know what was expected of the Red Cross in this community. Because even though there is a national organization, each chapter really could pretty well determine its own program. There were two or three I would say, nationally involved programs and then the rest of them you fit into the needs of the community. It's on the basis of that, that not immediately but soon, we became very much interested and involved in a blood bank. And with the help of some doctors in Holland and with nurses we started a blood bank which still is running today. At that point we did it upstairs right in the offices. Once a month the doctors gave their time, the nurses...everybody was a volunteer.

JM: And that blood was essentially to go to veterans? Wounded veterans?

BM: It was not designated. We would take the blood there and it would be brought to the Holland Hospital for the night. The next morning somebody would take it to Lansing and it would be made into plasma so that it could be shipped wherever it would be needed.

JM: What was the response to that drive?

BM: Terrific, just terrific! We never had problems meeting whatever was needed at that point.



JM: I think the popular image of the Red Cross in wartime is bandage rolling. Obviously it much have been much more than that.

BM: We did that. We had the whole basement of the Temple Building and we did rolling bandages and we did a lot of knitting mufflers and caps and all kinds of things. I can remember afternoon after afternoon. I would work in the office in the morning and then a volunteer would come in the afternoon so I could go out and deliver yarn to the church women's groups all over the county and pick up what they had done before and ship it out.

JM: So you had an automobile at your disposal?

BM: Yes, one of the automobile companies loaned us a vehicle.

JM: Obviously, gas rationing wasn't a problem for you.

BM: We got special stamps for the times that we needed it.

JM: Was this the only collection point for the county? Holland?

BM: No, we had an office in Grand Haven too. So I was in the Holland office Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and I was in Grand Haven Tuesday and Thursday. We had a woman in the Grand Haven office, but the rest of the time she had all volunteers (tape ends)...

JM: Earlier you had said something about having to meet parents who had lost service people. Do you want to comment on that?

BM: Yes. Not often. But it happened often enough to make it a real challenging kind of responsibility. We would receive a message, either by telephone or by wire, relative to illness or injury or death of a service man. And in preparation for that, we trained

a number of people that we called home service people. Mostly women, but we had some men and some of those were ministers, who then would agree to either carry that message to that person or accompany us as we went. And when I say us, we trained these home service workers for something like three or four months, helping them to understand and be prepared for such. These were all volunteers, and we had them scheduled so that twenty-four hours a day there was someone that could be contacted relative to that kind of need. Or if somebody were injured in this country and we'd hear from the Red Cross, from the station, wherever that person was, then we'd go to the home of the relative and often assist with financial help to get an airflight there as soon as possible.

JM: These people that you would contact, would these be people who would normally not have a church relationship? Is that why the Red Cross would step in or did they duplicate, the church and the Red Cross?

BM: Well, I don't know that the church...

JM: Well, I'm thinking about...Normally a pastor would probably make the call.

BM: Well, if the pastor knew it. I guess at this point I'm saying...That's an interesting question. Let me just say this. I seldom went anywhere without the pastor of the person. I don't know what other chapters did. I just know that in Holland and Zeeland, well, in Ottawa County, it was the way to go because those people for the most part were members of churches. But there were those times when there were people who were not members of churches.

JM: Having been away during that period myself I have no understanding of what life

must have been like during the war here in Holland for the people who stayed home.

Could you comment on that?

BM: There were certain things that we couldn't do because people weren't around to do them.

JM: For example?

BM: Well, I would say in terms of...Talk about a social life. You had to make your own life during those years because there just weren't people around to become involved in that. Then with gas rationing and everything else a lot of things had to be planned so that you could walk and so forth. I don't think we ever felt deprived in a way. We all had the spirit that we wanted to be a part of what was happening in our country and in the world, and I was so busy with my job that I never would feel that...

JM: What about food rationing? And the availability of clothing?

BM: There were things you couldn't get. But in a normal family with the number of people that you had and so forth and the number of {ration} books that we had, I don't think that we ever missed anything, ever. I don't remember feeling deprived of a thing during that. That's wonderful and it's not so wonderful because you wish you could say that you had given to this whole effort. And some people did by the kinds of jobs that they took in industry and so on.

JM: Certainly you did. Now, obviously the Red Cross had to go through an incredible recruiting program to meet the needs of service men at camps and overseas. Was that a responsibility of your chapter as well?

BM: I would say yes. I mean, we felt a responsibility. I didn't go anywhere. I learned so many things in the Red Cross that later on I used in every job that I took and I've have many of them! One of them was that I never go into a group today without looking at everyone there and listening to them and watching them and saying, "Now, where could they fit?" if I were looking for someone for a position. And I did that in the Red Cross too. But basically during the war we had people coming to us constantly saying, "What can we do?"

JM: Oh, is that right?

BM: There were times when I'd say, "How are we going to use all these people that want to help?" And then you often did find people that really didn't have a whole lot of skill and we had to be patient and we had to do a lot of teaching.

JM: Was that true of the county in general or were there certain areas of the county that were particularly more responsive?

BM: I would say they came from everywhere. I learned to know every church and every school in Ottawa County because it was through Parent-Teachers Club and through church organizations that we would send out word. We were going to need this or that done. When we had our blood drives we would always go through those organizations. It was wonderful, the kind of response that we had.

JM: You're still a member and active at Third Church of course. The experience that Third Church had I suppose would be rather typical of other churches. Could you outline a little bit how the life at Third Church changed because of the war. Do you have any thoughts on that?

BM: You know, nothing immediately comes to mind except to say that our church, like every church or every organization, realized that there were some things we couldn't do that we had been used to doing, both because the resources weren't there and with the men gone, women had to take on some more responsibility.

JM: I'm impressed by the responsibility that pastors must have had if they were loyal pastors to their men who were in the service. They must of done a lot of work in terms of keeping in contact and special pastoral work too. But that must have been an extra...

BM: Yes. Both in keeping in touch with...I surely hope so. I was just trying to think whether we had any kind of regular correspondence that we sent. I would imagine.

JM: I would think Third Church would have.

BM: I imagine that they would send copies of their bulletins and their newsletters and information so that people around the world would know who else...

JM: There again you had a responsibility for volunteers because that was a pretty tedious job in those days to multiply and mimeograph et cetera. How long did you stay with the Red Cross?

BM: From 1943-1953 - ten years. Loved every minute of it. Got to thinking that this would be where I would stay realizing that the needs and the design and the direction would change no doubt after the war.

JM: You were still involved in the aftermath of the war?

BM: Very much so. Veterans came back and the Korean War and then the veterans came back and there was a whole lot of adjustment to make. Men would come back and

couldn't find a job. We helped them with food and with clothing and we did even try to help them find jobs. With other organizations, American Legion, the Vets, and so forth, we all...We tried not to duplicate, we tried to each take a particular responsibility.

JM: When you came into the Red Cross in 1943, you replaced somebody who was the sole paid employee. Obviously that had to change through those ten years. How did it look when you left?

BM: We didn't hire an awful lot of people because we got all volunteers. I had one secretary in this office and one in Grand Haven just to be absolutely sure that there was continuity of service all the time. And although the volunteers were wonderful, there was just that feeling that there would be somebody who could be responsible.

JM: Especially in war time.

BM: That's right. And so many times that we would be dealing with so many people that volunteers just couldn't handle it. So we had one other paid staff in the Holland office and one in Grand Haven. But otherwise, everything else was done by volunteers. I'm so grateful for that experience because I found that there's a resource out there that many, for instance, churches, are not using. People that need to work - need to have something to do! And during the war everybody wanted to do something. Then after the war soon we began to see that women and men became involved in other kinds of things. But there were many of them who stayed on for years after I left. I'd come back and meet them on the street or something and they were still involved in those things. Now I find, as I said a little bit earlier, the things

that I learned in Red Cross - how to raise money - because it was voluntary gifts that made that thing going.

JM: I left my wallet home knowing that you had that skill (laughs).

BM: How to build a budget. And how to organize people for emergencies and so on and so forth. In other words, how to recruit people. How to train people. How to keep them involved so that they feel that it's theirs rather than that they're doing something for somebody else. And all of that then I used when in 1953 I left the Red Cross.

JM: Tell us about that. How did that happen? Was it sudden?

BM: Just out of the blue! I had a cousin by the name of Maurice Marcus, who is a minister now in the Presbyterian Church but at that point he was in the Reformed Church, and he was on the Board of Domestic Missions of the denomination. And also on that Board was Margaret Lubbers, wife of the president at Hope College. And she was also a member of the Red Cross Board. And Maurie knew that they needed somebody in New York for the Board of Domestic Missions, and Margaret Lubbers knew me through the Red Cross. I don't know how they got together but the two of them decided that maybe I would make a good candidate because the executive was resigning.

JM: Who did you succeed? Who was that executive who resigned?

BM: Her name was Dorothy Holmes. She was from Spring Lake.

JM: And what was her position?

BM: She was what they called the executive secretary of the Red Cross of the County.

JM: Oh, I see. I was thinking about the person...I'm sorry, I was in a different context.

Go ahead.

BM: So that's how I...Okay, she was the executive.

JM: I was thinking about the person you eventually replaced on the Board of Domestic Missions.

BM: Okay. She was an executive secretary. That was Helen Brickman.

JM: Oh yes. Okay.

BM: I didn't know her. I met her once in my life and from the day that I came to the office she left and I never saw her again. But anyway, Maurie walked into my office one morning (this is in the Red Cross, 6 East Eighth Street) and said (he was at that time the minister of the Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids), "I think it's time for you to leave Holland." (Laughs). I said, "Oh, is that right?" He always was that kind of a guy. "Yeah", he said, "We've got something that we think you would be interested in." And when he said New York I just kind of laughed. But pursued it after he said to me, "Take a good look at it." And then Mrs. Lubbers filled me in further about what the job would be. At that point the Board of Domestic Missions had just become an organization because there had been a Women's Board and a Men's Board and they had merged. And Dr. Vanden Berg had been named the executive secretary for that new board. But the women said, "We have to have a representative too," because they each had their own executives before. So in other words, they were looking for someone to come in there. So they were going to meet in Bethany Reformed Church in Kalamazoo and invited me to come down and be interviewed. I went down, met Mrs. Peale for the first time and Mary Brinig from



Marble Collegiate Church and for the life of me at this moment I can't think who the president of the Board was. An older man. I can see him but I can't say his name. Well, I was interviewed and I didn't really feel at that given moment that I should respond favorably, but they kept after me and (laughs) interestingly enough offered me a little bit more money although that had not been an issue. It wasn't that much even but...

JM: The cost of living was quite a bit more.

BM: To move to New York was the big thing! My father had died. My mother was alone. I just felt this might not be the thing to do. But after a lot of discussing and prayer and encouragement from people in the church here and so forth, I finally decided this would be a real challenge. So, in September of 1953, I moved to New York. As I said, I met Helen Brickman, my predecessor, for one day. She laid out all the work that had to be done and left. But she left two or three very well trained people in the office so that I could walk right in and within six weeks I had a grasp of what the situation was.

JM: To whom did you report?

BM: To the Board. Directly to the Board. The Board of Domestic Missions had about six or seven different committees. They had one on Kentucky and the American Indian work, on inner city work, on Mexico. They had one called Communications which meant publications and so on and so forth. And I was assigned to Kentucky, and the American Indian work...Oh, and there was a personnel committee and I worked with that committee plus the one on communications. So I had a wide range of

responsibility and I did that for fifteen years in a variety of ways. During those years, certain kinds of changes would take place. But on the whole, I remained responsible for those areas.

JM: It would be tempting to really go into detail in that particular area, but I know that's not too relevant to this particular tape. But it must have been fascinating and I know that you are still remembered in many of those areas and fields with your presence there.

BM: The people working in all of those areas sort of became my extended family and were marvelous to me. When I went to the field to live with them for a week or sometimes longer, to come to know them and to be a part of that ministry, I shall be forever grateful. Of course the churches in Holland supported that program, the Reformed Churches, so that I often came back and also being responsible in a sense for recruitment of missionaries, I came back to Hope College and to Western Seminary regularly. We would send in those days, and it's done somewhat today but not to the extent that we did, students to all of our fields in this country during the summer. I would come to interview those students and see to it that they got their assignments.

JM: And when you vacationed did you come back to Holland?

BM: Yes, primarily. Until the later years. The first years I lived in an apartment alone and then the latter years while I was living in New York I shared an apartment with a woman who was the executive for the near east for the United Church of Christ - which was a good experience because I learned about another part of the world that I

really wouldn't have before. But otherwise, coming to Michigan was really my vacation. And to watch Holland grow! Wow! During those years! Just to see the good things...

JM: Those would be the years 1953 to...

BM: '68.

JM: And you felt the growth there was as dramatic as now?

BM: Yes, I think so. It was because I wasn't here continually that each time I'd come home I'd see these other things happening.

JM: Would you agree that perhaps the mores of the town were changing in that era too?

BM: Yes. Just by reading the front page of the Holland paper. Before I left this town, I think there had been one murder as I recall in all those years and then all of sudden what goes on here now is unbelievable.

JM: That was true even in the sixties, is that what you're saying?

BM: Sure. It has grown, but that change had begun.

JM: As you think back to growth of institutions or development of institutions in that period, what buildings or what changes took place then? Was the campus radically changed in that period of 1953-1968? Anything that we can point too?

BM: There were some new dormitories on Hope's campus during that time.

JM: There were new church developments which affected the mother churches too, were there not, like Maplewood and...

BM: Yes, Trinity and let's see. In the sixties I don't think Christ Memorial was alive yet.

JM: So there had been a dispersion of the people who had been in the "pioneer churches"

into newer congregations which tended to change the whole pattern of life in the older churches as well. We'll get back again to that later, but let's move on now to your next responsibility.

BM: Quickly because it doesn't necessarily relate to Holland and so on and so forth. But I went in with the Board of Domestic Missions and for those years, in 1968 we went through the first denominational reorganization. And that was a difficult time primarily because I really don't think we really understood what was happening. But basically also the way it was handled. We were told that we had to resign our jobs and then we would be considered perhaps for some of the new jobs, but there was no guarantee. And that's not a pleasant experience.

JM: It was a more modern technique, was it not?

BM: Yes. Our people had been attending all these workshops that industry and business were giving about organization.

JM: Sensitivity training, group dynamics.

BM: They had reorganized the denomination, the whole headquarters program. I looked at all the jobs that they had now designed and said to myself there's not really one there that I would be interested in. As they began to appoint people I began to realize, boy, you know, there is certainly not going to be anything there. Mert De Velder was the general secretary and I talked to him about it. One hadn't been appointed in what we called the kitchen cabinet...they had a mission man and they had an education man and they had social area, evangelism, and stuff. But they hadn't gotten anybody for the communications area at that point. So Mert said, "Why don't

you take that and then let's see. I'm sure that we're going to have to redo some things one of these days." I had been doing communications with the Board of Domestic Missions but I never really fell for it that much. It really wasn't my thing.

JM: How would you describe that position?

BM: Printing. It would have to do with all the print materials, making all the arrangements for the speakers, and then, of course, by that time we were getting into video...

JM: Would public relations be a part of it?

BM: Yes, in a sense that would be true. But more paper and celluloid than anything else. I did it but I began to realize after I got into it that it really wasn't my thing. So then I said to Mert, "I think it's time I look somewhere else." Of course (laughs) he had all those men but he had to have a woman. And so he kept saying, "No, let's keep thinking." So I began to dream a bit and finally said to him one day, "I would like to open an office of voluntary services." When I was with Domestic Missions I had sent these volunteers to the fields during the summer and so forth and now, even though I was no longer in it, I kept getting these inquiries and I just we could expand that. I had been reading enough about mission in those days to see that was going to be the future of mission anyway. So, he said, "Well, design an office, a job, a position." So I did. Then it had to go to the executive committee and it had to go through all this and that. So those were some kind of difficult days. But finally they said, "We approve it." And so they opened an Office of Volunteer Services. And I thoroughly enjoyed it. As I said, it could almost reproduce everything I did at the Red Cross

office. I recruited the people. I trained them the best I could for whatever jobs they were going to take, orient them to where they were going. And...

JM: And then you were traveling and dealing with people.

BM: Right.

JM: And that brought you back to Holland much more often.

BM: The same old thing. I praise the Lord every day for that opportunity. I did that from '71 to '74, that's three years. Loved every minute of it! Then I was appointed to a committee to seek a successor to the director of Reformed Church Women. I had been involved in them sort of tangentially over all the years. But I was on the committee and we were working to outline the specific responsibilities and the needed expertise. At about the second meeting of the committee somebody said to me, "You ought to take that job." I said, "No, I'm very happy where I am." Well, they kept meeting but they didn't begin to look elsewhere and I finally said to them, "You got to do something else about this," you know. And then one night I thought, "Well, maybe the Lord is saying something. Maybe I'd better find out if I could take on that job while I did volunteer services too. So I went to talk to Arie and to Mert and said, "I can save the denomination some money if I took that."

JM: Arie was the successor to Mert Develder?

BM: Yes, but he was still the program...

JM: Identify him for the tape.

BM: Arie Brouwer was the fellow that really was the overall program man so this would be related to that.

JM: He was the General Program Council person.

BM: That's right. And Mert was the General Secretary. So we designed a job which would mean that I would work for Adult Volunteer Services three days a week, or three-fifths of my time, and two-fifths of my time for Reformed Church Women. After much negotiation, that's the way it went. So I stayed with that until I retired.

JM: When you were sixty-five?

BM: When I was sixty-six. And when would that have been?

JM: That would be 1986.

BM: 1986. Yeah. I'm retired, what...eleven years?

JM: Now, once again you had the opportunity to see changes. We talked about changes up to 1968 and we're still talking within the context of the denomination and the local church perhaps as well as other things. But what changes did you see between '71 and '86? The explosion of growth at Hope College in terms of buildings?

BM: Yes! Hard to even recognize that place. Growth in numbers of students. And in new churches and I would say then and continuing now has been the explosion of non-denominational churches. Independent churches in Holland. We may have one or two in my earlier lifetime. But now they're meeting in every school and every available building it seems. I don't know if there is some sociologist that is studying that to know why that is happening here or not.

JM: It would be a very good study. I'm puzzled too to be honest with you. We talk about "unpaid bills of the church," maybe that's part of it. But that's another story too. Did you have any relationship with some of the pioneer industrialists in this

town? In other words, the Haworths, the Princes and so on. You must have seen their development. Or weren't you acquainted with them?

BM: Not really. I knew the Landwehrs who were involved in the Holland Furnace Company. Norma Landwehr was a classmate of mine for a few years. She left and went to a private school, I think when she was a sophomore. But we stayed friends for quite a while. So I got to know them, and in fact, when I was just a youngster. Her grandfather lived in what we called "the flats" which were some apartments on the corner of Fourteenth and Maple. So we knew that family a little bit but my path just didn't cross with Ed Prince. I knew of him. I knew of Gerry Haworth because he was a teacher in the public school system.

JM: You mentioned your father working for Holland Shoe. He spent his whole career there. He died relatively young. What happened to Holland Shoe?

BM: It was sold and became the Holland-Racine Shoe Company. Sold to a shoe company out of Racine and that made some tremendous changes there and my father was not very happy with it. When it was the Holland Shoe Company it was "family", kind of, you know, local community stuff. When the Racine people came in, they were just a different breed and my dad just couldn't adapt to that. He finally left...well, in a sense he kind of retired although he couldn't afford it. So then he took a couple of other jobs before he died. Not to denigrate them in anyway but just to say that it's a different whole experience that they've had and they bring that into a community like this.

JM: That's going to happen more and more.



BM: Yes.

JM: What happened to Holland-Racine Shoe Company?

BM: It went out of business what...a few years ago. I'm not sure. I don't know exactly why, but it is no more.

JM: Now you moved here upon retirement in 1986, and just briefly, I know that you did not sever your denominational activities to a degree. You were tapped for this and for that and the other. Why don't you tell us about it.

BM: Yes. I retired thinking I'll go back to Holland and I'll become a Red Cross volunteer. Really! Absolutely thought that would be happening. And I have to admit it's terrible! I have not been to the Red Cross office in all these years. I did meet Wally Ewing who was the executive. He called me one day and said, "Let's have lunch. I've got some questions to ask." So we had lunch and I was able to give him some material that I had in my files. But, no, I have not become involved in the community as I had hoped. Because the churches kept after me. I served first in a number of fund campaigns that the church had and I traveled the country...

JM: After retirement.

BM: After retirement. Now we're talking about since 1986.

JM: But you had severed your relationship with the Women's Department pretty much?

BM: Well, when I retired, I retired from both positions and I really had very little to do with the Women's Department. They took over and they went on their own. They got a full time person after I retired. And have had two since. But the denomination - first, it was "98 by '98" and the other I can't remember now.

JM: Well, we won't go into detail on that either but were you really the staff facilitator in those drives?

BM: Everything was volunteer. I got nothing for any of that which was fine with me because I had really decided after I retired that I didn't really want to work. That if I could afford it, I did want to become a volunteer.

JM: You did become involved in Third Church in a more specific way.

BM: Became an elder.

JM: And when was that?

BM: It must have been 1989.

JM: You were not the first woman elder in that church?

BM: No. Jantina Holleman from Hope College was our first elder and Etta Hesselink had been an elder there. But I was elected elder there.

JM: And that led to your being a delegate to the General Synod?

BM: In 1991.

JM: And you want to tell us more about that?

BM: Well, that was again the shock of my life! I went as a delegate to General Synod never dreaming that I would be nominated for a position there. But apparently there had been those the minute they knew that I had been named a delegate began to think about that. So on the first ballot if you would get fifteen votes or whatever then that's an open ballot. Anybody can name anybody and in that way my name must have been submitted by a number of people and so I became a candidate and was elected as the vice president in 1991.

JM: Tell me about that experience. Did that create any ripples in Holland at all? Ripples of joy, perhaps, but was there any sense of...because you were the first woman?

BM: Yes, the first woman. I never felt, that to be honest with you. In fact, I didn't feel it in the denomination either and I lay that to the fact that I had been in denominational responsibility for fifteen years, from '53-'68, and I had stayed in homes across this country because when I traveled I tried to save money. And wonderful hospitality across the country! And had been so involved with so many people over those years, that Marcus was a familiar name, and I really believe that's what made it all possible.

JM: They knew your personality, your strengths.

BM: Right. I was a known thing at that point and...

JM: And then, of course, by virtue of tradition you became the president the next year although you had to be elected. Then, of course, the pressure was upon you to take a stronger leadership and involvement role, correct? In the denomination?

BM: Yes. You're called upon to do a number of things which are probably ordinary things for ordained people. But since I was non-ordained, it took considerable planning and preparation...visited as many churches as I could visit, went to classis meetings...went to regional synod meetings here and there to come to know the denomination better than I had - although there again, every place I went I knew people because I had dealt with them in some other kind of way.

JM: There was an ecumenical responsibility too, wasn't there as President?

BM: Yeah, although I didn't do a lot of that. It's interesting because everybody usually thinks that when somebody's elected president you immediately take a trip overseas

someplace. I said to Ed Mulder, who was then the General Secretary, "I will not go overseas unless there's an invitation. I don't believe in just going for my personal sake. If they need a representative of the denomination and if I can do it I would be happy to go." Well, no such request happened to come during the year that I was president, so I did not take a trip. I spent my time in this country and in Canada because my interest was the volunteer and the development of a program of training volunteers, preparation for service in the church. So I'm delighted with the response that I've had to that. We now have training. I made proposals to the General Synod on the diaconate because I just think that the deacons aren't used at all as they should be and that's developing now with training through Betty Voskuil.

JM: You have also been very active in supporting women in ministry as an issue.

BM: That's true. I think one reason why I probably could have been elected is because I wasn't ordained at that given moment. As we see the votes each year now in General Synod, there's always a woman nominated but basically it's been an ordained woman. So far we just haven't been able to generate that.

JM: It's my observation that Holland Classis, that is the Holland judicatory, has more leadership from women in ministry than most classes in the Reformed Church. In fact, almost all classes in the Reformed Church. Can you put your finger on why that might be?

BM: Part of it could be that the churches are becoming in Holland...come to know the women as they are studying in seminary now. You know, some of those women serving in various positions while they're at seminary and we have to be grateful that

the women that we have had, the ordained women who have served here, have done a fine piece of work. And therefore, when the name is suggested for a position they are willing to consider that.

JM: It's also true, I believe, that Holland has a culture of it's own. I can remember when the Holland and the Zeeland Classes were one and then they were divided and this is not to put down either of the classes but they do have a different culture, don't they?

BM: Quite true. Very true.

JM: Now getting back to you moving to Holland in 1986. You've moved back to your ancestral home?

BM: I did. In the home in which I was born.

JM: And a lot of room there.

BM: And I had eleven rooms and I thought to myself, "This is ridiculous." My mother had died and I didn't need that room and as I said I was doing these things for the denomination so I still was traveling and that meant I always had to have somebody mow the lawn while I was away and take care of the sidewalks and stuff during the winter. And even if I hired somebody I'd come home and find that they hadn't done it. So finally I thought, "I've got to go someplace where I don't have to worry about all these things." And therefore I moved into a condominium. And it's, as you now, wonderful, because you don't have to think about those things.

JM: Do you still travel a great deal?

BM: Yes. I have more so than I had anticipated to. Those first six years that I retired from '86 to '92 I was doing mostly denominational things. And since then I've sort

of begun to think a little bit more of doing things just for the fun of it. For instance, this year I went to Turkey for a few weeks. Then I'm going to go to Japan next month. And those are all purely personal travels.

JM: My sister, Trudy Vander Haar, made the comment a couple years ago, "I like to travel but just once I like to go someplace else besides a Third World country!"  
(Laughs).

BM: Yeah, that's true too.

JM: Now of course you are still active as a church leader beyond the local congregation. You are what...

BM Well, denominationally I carry no...(Tape 1, Side B stops)  
(Tape 2, Side A resumes)

JM: Of course, you moved to an entirely different environment. You became a resident of New York City. How long did you live in New York City and what were your circumstances there? An apartment? A house? Did you live in the suburbs?

BM: I lived right in Manhattan. In fact, I think I was the only executive. And many of the people who work there do not live in the city. They live in New Jersey or they live on Long Island but I lived in Manhattan within walking distance of the office.

JM: And what was your church?

BM: Well, basically when I first moved there it was Elmendorf Reformed Church in East Harlem. I went because I knew Don De Young who was the pastor but I became a member of that congregation - didn't officially take my membership there, but I felt like a member of that congregation. And today I still have many friends there. They

were my family to a large extent while I was in New York. Two or three times when I was in the hospital they were the first people to come and call. It was a great, great experience. Then to move back to Holland it was a different city than when I left in 1953. Changed in so many ways in growth, of size, and lots of different kinds of people in terms of Hispanics and Asians. And it's new to me now to have the kinds of challenges and difficulties that we have because of that. We have to learn to live together.

JM: It's new to you but it was not something you were unfamiliar with in New York?

BM: No, I'm glad you say it that way because I lived that way in New York. My roommate and I were the only Caucasian people on the floor. I lived in a building that had four hundred apartments and the majority of those were other nationalities and it was wonderful to come to know them. Never too intimately because my job took me away so much, but at least it was a window on the world really to know people like that and to ride the subways and the buses because I had no car. It was just a totally different experience than coming back to Holland where in many cases you can walk where you want to get to or you get in your car and drive there. Which is good and bad I think sometimes because it keeps you from touching other people - really relating to other people. You can keep so private in a place like this and therefore don't come to know those people that have moved into our community.

JM: Now, some people would say that what has happened to Holland is pretty much a negative thing. You might look at it from that point of view but you might also look at it from a positive point of view.

BM: I think I do. In terms of opportunities to come to know them. To know people from other cultures. I have traveled around the world and been on every continent and have learned so much from people living there that I would wish that for people. Now I know sometimes they bring other kinds of things with them but so do we! I mean, there are things about us that people don't always understand either. I think it's an opportunity that we have to just continually work at. It isn't going to come easily because so many of us, at least, we were born in this town and lived here for a good portion of time. Have to break away from some of those things that we've done.

JM: There are a number of conscious efforts to build bridges between cultures and ethnic groups here in town. And of course there is always the presence of the Red Cross. Would you like to comment on some of those efforts?

BM: I think there are a number of agencies in town who are attempting to help us to understand one another and to support one another even in terms of...I'm thinking of the museum, the Holland Arts Council, they do all kinds of interesting things to help us to come to know habits and personalities and things of people other than ourselves. I think it's all here. It's how we use the resources that we have.

JM: Is it right to say that there is basically a reservoir of good will because of the religious background of this community that it would tend to cause people to be a bit more altruistic than they might be in other communities in regard to this whole change?

BM: I would hope that that's true. I am not so sure because we have had some



experiences recently where people, and I'm sure they don't know what they're doing, but certainly have made some racist remarks in presentations that just hurt to the core. And I would hope that the churches will keep working at interpreting to people what it means to live in a community of nations. I'm delighted with one experience in our own denomination which started out to be a Hispanic congregation and remains predominantly that, but it now is really an exciting thing because they have a number of students from Hope College that come. And other people who have come who...

JM: Will you identify that church?

BM: This is the Crossroads Chapel which is now meeting at the former Sixth Reformed Church on the corner of 12th and Lincoln. Their service is similar to the one I attended in New York when I went to the church in East Harlem which is, well, I think there were four or five of us that were Caucasians. Everybody else was African-American. Then little by little the Hispanics moved in so then we would have the service and the sermon would either be given first in English and then in Spanish or the other way around. Now it gets to be a rather long service but it's a wonderful way to share that kind of thing. And they're doing that here in the Crossroads Chapel - first in English and then in Spanish.

JM: Do you think there's any "white flight" here in this community?

BM: Yes, I think so. I think if we look at the central city and the homes that remain there.

JM: How about the development of Zeeland? I think that's partly being developed because of "white flight" from Holland.

BM: Oh, is that right! That is something I hadn't thought about. But now that you mention it, I'm surprised at the people I know who have moved to Zeeland.

JM: And I have talked to a number of people, and I have had of course living in the Chicago and the Orange County, California, areas, a close hand acquaintance with diversity and also with the reality of white flight and my emphasis of course is that you can't! And it's very difficult for people to understand that. It doesn't really pay off to do that even if it were morally okay - you know what I mean.

BM: But it is difficult, you know, because I lived down in the central city and now when I go back into that area and see those homes that we considered precious all those years and took care of them and now...and it's a sad thing. Because it isn't that the people don't want to do it. I don't think they know how to do it and so forth.

JM: When you're living hand to mouth you don't have money for it.

BM: Right! And therefore that's why I think the city...we have to find ways and I think in a way we have with this, what is it called? The agency on the community, whatever? Over on Van Raalte and Fourteenth Street where they supply paint and they supply materials for you to help to take care of your home.

JM: If you were to give any advice to the City Council or the mayor about direction...that's too detailed (laughs) for those of us who are not that involved, but is the City moving in the appropriate direction? Is it having dreams about growth that may not be appropriate? How would you comment on that?

BM: Well, that is such a major thing that I don't know. I think our City Council is doing a good job. It's not easy! And you know they've got everybody watching them and

trying to give them direction.

JM: We have an energetic and visionary mayor as well.

BM: We surely do!

JM: He's a salesman and so naturally there are big projects on the table.

BM: Yes. And I know it's not going to be easy to decide where to put that Area Center, but I think we have to just keep working and then whatever happens support it. I think that's part of the problem that people if they don't like it they just say, "Okay, I won't have anything to do with it."

JM: One last area perhaps is your relationship with the Classis of Holland. You are the president of that classis now.

BM: (Laughs). Yes. That's another surprise!

JM: Not the first woman but...

BM: No, Carol Myers has been. Well, it's interesting because you were talking a little bit a while ago I think about the different organizations within the denominations. We have a classis which is the local organization and then the regional which used to be sort of more by states but now is a little bit larger area in some cases. Actually it's at the classis level that most everything gets done ultimately.

JM: At least that's where the authority is.

BM: That's right and that's where things are initiated and they may have to seek resources from regional or denominational programs. But I want to say this - I have come to realize during this year how much time ministers and lay people give to the church. When we have meetings and they come and they work for hours on things and that's

all beyond what they're doing in their local church - I am eternally grateful. I don't think I really realized that. While I was working as a denominational officer, I attended classis meetings but I'd come and make a presentation and then I'd leave. So I never got the full picture of what was going on. I'm deeply grateful to men and women who spend hours on things that are going on at a classis level and that means in terms of helping ministers when they get into certain situations where they need counsel or congregations such as Crossroads Chapel now as they move into this new opportunity for ministry. To support them in that kind of thing - I think it's exciting!

JM: Ecumenism when I began my ministry appeared to be largely a national or a denominational thing. How has it changed? Or hasn't it changed?

BM: Only again from my own experience I would say that it has diminished at a national level. You don't hear an awful lot about the National Council of Churches anymore. I can't really get excited frankly about things that I hear about what they're doing. I do say that I belong to an organization called Church Women United, which at one point was part of the National Council and then became separate, and again I admire those women. They work so hard at a variety of projects, both to raise money for ministries and to help women to grow in interest and in Bible study and that kind of thing, so that just came out of the blue too. I got a letter one day asking would I serve on a national finance committee. And the first thing that meant I was on the national executive council and that means another kind of meeting. But I am grateful to be a part of that. But I see less and less of it on the national level. I think it's much more at a regional or even a city or...

JM: Aren't we doing things congregationally that we would never think about doing forty or fifty years ago?

BM: Yes.

JM: And what is the relationship between the Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches in Holland now as you see it? Because that's really a part of our history, isn't it?

BM: It certainly is a part of our history. I served for the last three years on a committee called CRC-RCA Action Committee. It's purpose was primarily to plan at least one service a year when we would worship together. And that has usually been a Pentecost service. I don't know. I could wish for more. I could wish that we find more ways of sharing.

JM: Is it possible that what we are doing together is an attempt to join forces against a third force? Here are these two like-minded denominations and there is another rather amorphous religious expression forming in Holland and are we joining hands on that basis?

BM: It could be that we feel that we need strength like that. But I hope that it has more than that in its meaning, that we find so much similarity in what we're doing that it's almost a sin when we start a new church in the name of either one of the denominations with all of the expense that comes with that and so forth where just a block away the other denomination is doing it.

JM: You are a product of the public school system and particularly of Holland High School. I don't remember having much relationship with Holland Christian High but it is my impression that that school has flourished since we...

BM: I agree.

JM: Not only flourished in numbers but in influence, in quality, in sophistication.

BM: I agree, but don't you think that some of that relates also to the charter schools that are now starting? And I have mixed feelings about that because there are those who feel, "Well, sure. Those are the elite that are going to go to that school." They aren't, oh no, anybody can come but...and it bothers me when I keep reading that the charter schools are organized because parents can have more to say, because there can be better discipline, and so forth. I don't see why that can't happen in the public school. Of course, if by sending your children to a charter school you're making a commitment, "I will give time and I will do this," of course they are going to have more resource than from the public school. But I think you're right. I think that the Christian School...and what I find is a number of people from my church send their kids to the Christian School including my nephew and so...

JM: And the leadership of the Christian School is much involved in the community. They have actually been leaders for bond issues relating to the public school system. There have been faculty and so on. An interesting phenomenon.

BM: That may well be true.

JM: Well I know that you have a diploma from Holland High School and I know that you have a bachelor's degree from the very best college in the whole United States...And a member of the best class of that college. But you are also called "Doctor" on occasion. How did that all happen?

BM: That was another one of those shocks. I got my Masters at the University of

Michigan and then I started working on a Ph.D at New York University, in New York. I did most of the class work that I had to do and then began to work on a dissertation, or decide what to do for a dissertation, and by that time I was so terribly involved in all the other work I was doing that I never got to it. So, that's okay. I got out of it what I wanted. In the meantime, I get a letter from Hope College saying that they would like me to be there on a certain day in May and I was awarded an honorary doctorate in law.

JM: What year was that?

BM: I think in '62.

JM: That far back. Any other honors you'd like to mention?

BM: Well, Hope College has meant so much to me and I thought when they gave me that that would be enough for a lifetime. Then, was it two years ago, one of the Distinguished Alumni Award recipients. So that just was sort of the top of everything else. I'm grateful to Hope for all that it has meant in my life, I know that.

JM: We've spent about two and a half hours together and that's not nearly long enough, but is there anything else you'd like to add before I bring this to an end?

BM: No. I just think this is a wonderful project. I don't know how we're going to read all of these things that everybody has participated in, but it's all going to be available someplace. It will be wonderful reading.

JM: Well, thank you much, Beth. I've really been looking forward to this one. I look forward to all of them but this one in particular, and it's been a joy to have you in my life all these years.

BM: It's been good to know you.

JM: Thank you.



### Initial Contact Form

Name: Beth Eileen Marcus

Date of birth: May 3, 1920

Place of birth: Holland, MI.

Mother's name (include maiden name):

Etta Plaggemars

Father's name:

Jacob Marcus

Siblings' names (include birthdates if known):

Carl Jay - October 31, 1917

Doris Jean - [date removed]

Spouse's name (include wife's maiden name):

Date of marriage:

Place of marriage:

Children's names (include dates and places of birth):

Date of death:

Place of death and burial:

Religion and church membership:

Christian - Third Reformed Church, Holland, MI.

Schooling and/or other training:

Holland Public Schools, Hope College, University of Michigan,  
Western Michigan University, New York University, Union Seminary

Residential history (list all residences chronologically, noting the dates lived at each):

155 West 14th Street, Holland, MI - birth until 1953 (with one year  
in Fenton, MI. while I was teaching there.

102 East 22nd Street, New York City 1953-1966; 382 Central Park West,  
1966-1978; 1978-1982 - 155 West 14th St.; 854 York Ave, Holland -1982-

Occupational history (list all occupations chronologically, noting the place of work, the type of work to the  
done there, and the approximate salary): present time.

English and History Teacher, Fenton Mi. 1942-43 \$1400.00 a year.

Executive Secretary, American Red Cross Ottawa County, Mi. 1943-53, \$1600.00

Executive Board Of North American Missions Reformed Church in America \$5500-

Director of Promotion and Communications, RCA; Executive Director

Reformed Church Women, Director of Adult Voluntary Services \$3500.00

Membership in clubs and organizations (note dates of membership and offices held):

AAUW - 1942-53

Council of Social Agencies 1943-53

Holland Community Chest

Other general information:

Council of Southern Mountain Workers  
1953-68

Fellowship of American Indian Workers  
1953-68

Church Women United Executive Council  
Division of Home Missions, National  
Council of Churches